



State of Connecticut

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TO: Senator Gary LeBeau, Chair of the Commerce Committee
Representative Jeffrey Berger, Chair of the Commerce Committee

FROM: Representative Michael Christ, 11th District

DATE: March 11, 2008 -- Commerce Committee Public Hearing

RE: Testimony in Support of Raised House Bill 5878

Good morning Senator LeBeau, Representative Berger and members of the Commerce Committee. I am here to speak in support of **Raised House Bill 5878, *An Act Concerning the University of Connecticut Home Football Games***. As you may have heard, less than five years after playing its inaugural game at Rentschler Field in East Hartford, the UConn football team is negotiating a contract with Notre Dame that would require home games to be played at out-of-state venues.

I don't think I need to remind you of the economic benefits of having these games played in-state, including providing job opportunities and bringing visitors to the Capital Region. These are the same benefits UConn extolled a few years ago when selling this multi-million dollar project to the state.

Rentschler Field holds 40,000 people. The team played all seven of its home games at the stadium last season, averaging over 38,000 in attendance and selling out the last four games of the season. I don't think one could deny that over the years UConn Football has built up a loyal following across Connecticut and particularly in the Greater Hartford region. For years Connecticut residents have supported the team and followed them as their stats improved and they became a formidable opponent. When they needed a larger venue to help them build a major football program, we—the fans and taxpayers—built them a field, at a cost of \$91.2 million.

Those of us who have long supported our hometown team are proud that UConn has made it to the big time, but frankly it's a slap in the face to learn that UConn Football is willing to desert its loyal fans in order to fulfill Notre Dame's needs. The state foresaw this possibility and inserted a provision into

UConn's lease requiring all home games to be played at Rentschler. Now that Notre Dame has made this demand, UConn is preparing to go back on this agreement in favor of playing five "home" games at Gillette Stadium in Massachusetts or Giants Stadium in New Jersey in the coming years. As UConn continues to enhance its schedule, who can say how many additional home games will be outsourced?

This willingness to abandon the home crowd in exchange for exposure has become a pattern in UConn athletics, but in this circumstance the state must put its foot down and refuse to allow UConn Football to be bullied. In my opinion, UConn has a history of treating loyal fans with disloyalty. Please support this legislation.

Thank you for your consideration of this proposal.